N. B. Seabrook

THE

IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL MINISTRY.

A SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF

THE SYNOD OF VIRGINIA,

ON THE SIXTEENTH OF OCTOBER, 1817.

By JOHN H. RICE, A. M.

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TO THE

REV. ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER, D. D.

DEAR SIR.

If I have been taught to think justly of the ministry of the Gospel, and to entertain correct views of divine truth; or if I have made any attainments in the least degree qualifying me for usefulness in the Church, and the world; so far as human agency or instrumentality goes, I am more indebted to you than to any other man living. Pardon this public expression of my obligations, and the inscription of this Sermon to you, as a testimony of the fervent friendship, and high esteem of

THE AUTHOR.

Richmond, Oct. 23, 1817.

A SERMON, &c.

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher.—Romans, x. 14.

IN proportion as objects strike strongly on the senses, we are accustomed to take an interest in them; and in proportion to the depth of this interest, is our estimation of the objects by which it is excited. Hence it has often happened that things trivial in their nature, and temporary in their duration, have called forth the most powerful feelings of the human heart, and exercised the mightiest energies of the human mind; while objects invested with the highest moral grandeur, and outstripping, in their importance, the reach of computation, have been regarded as unworthy of notice. No power of numbers can express the disproportion between the things of time with their fleeting pageantries, and the things of eternity, with their awful realities. Yet the race of man is all activity and ardour in pursuit of the one;—while it is well, if he escapes the charge of folly and madness, who devotes his best powers to secure the interests of the other. A man may expend the energies of an immortal mind in obtaining a badge of office, a little brief authority, a few more houses than he can inhabit, a few more acres of land than he can cultivate, or a little more gold than he knows how prudently to use—and he shall be wise. Another may think himself under obligation to give his whole heart to the service of his God, and in all his thoughts and devices have reference to the glories of just men made perfect, and to the inheritance of the saints—and he shall be a fool. One man may be clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day—and he shall know how to enjoy life; another may restrain the inferior principles of his nature, and make it his constant aim, to discipline his heart, and exercise in the best manner those faculties which chiefly distinguish the human species from brutes, and ally it to

angels—and he shall meet with contemptuous pity from some, and open scorn from others.

These thoughts occurred to me when beginning to meditate on the subject of this day's discourse; and it seemed that they were not inapplicable to the real nature of the ministerial office, and the estimation in which it is held by many. We cannot suppose that the Apostle, in the words of the text, simply intended to announce the truism that men could not believe in an unknown Saviour, and that the Gospel could not be preached without a preacher. He, doubtless, had in view the momentous consequences of genuine faith; the salvation, in all its mighty dimensions, which is connected with it; and the appointed instrumentality of the ministry of the gospel in producing that wonderful result. The passage of scripture selected as a subject, when taken in its connection, leads us then to contemplate the importance of the gospel ministry.

This office is greatly underrated by the men of the world; who, enslaved by sense, respect and admire objects in proportion as they are splendid and pompous; delightful to the eye, and fascinating to the corrupt heart. And it is much more undervalued by men, who engage in it as a trade, and say, as was said by some among the ancients, We pray thee make us priests that we may get a morsel of bread; who become ministers of the Gospel that they may escape the necessity of digging and ploughing for their support; or because they imagine that they shall obtain greater respect in the eyes of the faithful, than they could ever hope to receive as farmers and mechanics.

And this leads me to observe, that in magnifying my office, it is far from my intention thus to enforce the respect of the world. This would be both fruitless and foolish.—The trumpeter of his own praise is generally, and deservedly, left to blow his trumpet alone. Besides; of how much value is worldly applause to the steward of the mysteries of Christ? When he shall give account of his stewardship, the question of approbation or condemnation will depend upon far other circumstances. The issue will be put on a quite different footing. Otherwise, what would become of Paul and his compeers, who were regarded in their day, as the offscouring of all things?

In proportion to the importance of an office is the responsibility of the incumbent; and the care, the vigilance, the zeal, the industry, and wisdom, with which it ought to be discharged. This is too obvious to require illustration; and it presents the true reason of the remarks which are offered on this occasion.

With this object in view, I shall be pardoned for dwelling still longer on the subject that has been thus introduced.

When there happens a corruption of that which is generally necessary for the support of animal life, the consequences are disastrous indeed. Should the air of a whole region become tainted with poisonous vapours; should the water become putrid; or the bread-stuffs be spoiled, pestilence would at once go forth as on the wings of the wind; it would be carnival time for death; and the all-devouring grave would be gorged with its prey. We should then know how to appreciate the importance of preserving in their purity these elements of our subsistence; and how thankful they ought to be, who have sound and wholesome bread to eat, sweet water to drink, and pure air to breathe! Now, if the value of any thing may be estimated according to the extent of the mischief which results from its perversion or corruption, then there exist historical proofs sufficient to shew the magnitude, and importance of the ministry of the Gospel.

And here one of the great benefits of ecclesiastical history is conspicuous. It shews us how, when the apostles and first preachers of Christianity went forth in the spirit of their master, renouncing all views of ambition, and worldly honour, and determining to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, the light of divine truth diffused its radiance, and dispersed the cloud of ignorance and superstition which hung over the world; and cheered the dark abodes of human wretchedness; and animated to the enjoyment of spiritual life those who were dead in trespasses and sins; and purified that mass of moral feculence, which spread its noisomeness through every avenue of human life—how the love of a being, clothed with all the attributes of excellence, took place of the superstitious dread of foul and obscene demons—how the pure and spiritual worship of the living God succeeded the dark, filthy and cruel rites of paganism—how benevolence reigned instead of selfishness; and kindness instead of malice; and meekness instead of ferocity; and forgiveness instead of revenge; and purity instead of lust. It shews after a long night of sin and sorrow, of crimes and follies, the brightness of a new day breaking on the world; arousing the slumbering consciences of the children of men, and awakening the voice of joy and gladness in the habitation of the true believer. Amidst the innumerable evils which then plagued and desolated the world, the eye reposes with peculiar pleasure on the scene exhibited within the pale of the Christian church, where all was peace with God, and love to man. But under the direction of the same faithful

and instructive guide, there is exhibited to our view a scene, in all respects the reverse of that, of which we have just offered a hasty sketch. When Christianity had extended its conquests and subdued a very large portion of the world to its sway; and when in the widely extended domains of Rome there were rival competitors for the imperial purple; the devil put it into the hearts of ambitious men to adopt measures for enlisting in support of their faction, the feelings and prejudices of Christians. The smile of royal favour was, no doubt, pleasant to those who had suffered under the frown of lordly persecutors; and it was thought that the time foretold by the prophet had fully come, "when kings should be nursing fathers and queens nursing mothers to the church." But these were deceitful smiles. The object of the great men of the day was to bolster up a doubtful and tottering cause by the aid of Christianity; and to support secular interests by the force of the powerful and lofty feelings which it excites. Hence, honours and emoluments were lavished on ecclesiastics; bishopricks were extended over whole provinces; and their revenues were poured into the lap of the church. This at once offered a strong temptation to the ambitious and the covetous to seek the high offices in the gift of a society thus favoured. An election to a bishop's *see* often created, in a whole province, as warm contentions, and as vehement disturbances, as an election to the seat of the Cæsar's did, in the whole empire. Then the object of the clerical office was forgotten. The spiritual influence which it afforded was perverted to purposes of folly, pride, and ambition. The scriptures were withdrawn from the people, and they were left in total darkness. A pompous ritual, borrowed partly from the temple service of the Jews, and partly from the rites of the pagans, was invented to gratify the senses of the populace, and afford amusement to the untaught crowd of disciples. The clergy were forbidden to marry; and thus, the strongest tie which binds an individual to the common interests of society being broken, there was formed a corps of men, having their own peculiar feelings, and schemes, and interests: the grossest corruption spread itself through all ranks of the clergy; their religious houses became almost as notorious for every species of wickedness, as the temples of the heathens: and then was exhibited the monstrous spectacle of a body of men, bearing the sacred name of ministers of the religion of Jesus, rivalling pagans in every kind of abomination; and to crown the whole, in the name and by the authority of the holy Saviour, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, selling indulgencies to their fellow mortals to rob and murder, to commit fornication and adultery! Thus was the glory of the Gospel marred, and its beauty tarnished.—Is the sacred name of liberty really dishonoured, and its value destroyed, because wicked men, under the pretences of patriotism, have introduced the wildest disorder, and the most iron-hearted oppression that ever crushed and ground into the dust our suffering race? No, my brethren. Neither ought Christianity to be rejected or slighted, because the base and vile, under its hallowed name, have violated every precept of its moral code, and set at nought every doctrine which it sanctions.

The legitimate inference, from the truths which have been stated, is, that the ministry of the Gospel is an office of pre-eminent importance; and that the interests of the church and of the species imperiously demand that its sphere of action should be clearly defined, its functions duly regulated, and its duties correctly understood.

The importance of this office will more fully appear from some other considerations which will be presented on this occasion. To give authority to what I am now about to produce, some passages will be cited from that book where we find the institution of the ministry, and which we regard as an authoritative annunciation of the will of God to man. "Take heed what ye do, (saith the scripture,) for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you; and judge not unjustly, nor accept the persons of the wicked, nor overthrow the righteous in judgment. Defend the poor and the fatherless; do justice to the afflicted and needy; and deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.—He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.—Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers; for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.—Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a master in heaven.—Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God.—Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.—Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.—Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.—Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.—Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is a specimen of scriptural precepts; and to this may be added one address to ministers of the gospel. "He that hath my

word, saith the Lord, let him speak my word faithfully.—Declare unto them the whole counsel of God."

From these passages of scripture, and the quotations might have been multiplied to any extent, it is obvious that the sphere of the minister's duty is co-extensive with all the relations which man sustains. It embraces every duty, in every situation of life. It reaches to the magistrate in his chair of state, to the judge on his bench, to the legislator in his hall, to the neighbour in his transactions with his fellow men, to the master in the arrangements of his family, to the husband and wife, the parent and child in their domestic circle; yea, and to a man in the inner chamber of his own bosom, his secret thoughts and purposes. For, to all these do the precepts of the divine word extend; and the minister of religion is bound faithfully to interpret, and fully to declare the whole will of the Almighty as revealed in his holy word, concerning all human interests and relations. These remarks serve not only to show the importance of the gospel ministry; but of affording the widest possible circulation to the Bible, and of regulating and managing the Christian church, as a society, according to the fundamental principles laid down in the Gospel. Men whose office is thus connected with all the relations of life, acknowledged as the authorised ministers of heaven, and going forth without check or control, would be armed with a power more dangerous than power in any other form, and would soon subjugate the world. Of this truth, we have been abundantly convinced by the experience of ages. To prevent this evil, God has appointed that his own word, which marks out the precise line of a minister's conduct, should be in the hands of all the people, that when their pastors deviate from the path of duty pointed out by their Master, and depart from the spirit which was in him, they may be detected and treated as they deserve. He has also given his sanction to the marriage of ministers; and thus by all the endearing ties of domestic life, by the feelings of husbands and fathers, has linked their interests with the common interests of the community. And what perhaps may be thought by some a greater security than this, he has clearly intimated that the people should have the choice of their own pastors; and possess a voice in their ecclesiastical judicatories, and equal powers in all their councils. These are the checks by which the influence of ecclesiastics is controlled, and rendered efficient only for doing good, according to the original appointment of our saviour Christ. I hope that I shall be forgiven if, utterly disclaiming the intention of making any reflection upon our brethren who differ from us, I remark here, that one reason of no small weight why I prefer the form of government of the Presbyterian church, is because the great general principles laid down in the Gospel, are accurately drawn out, and reduced to practice with a precise application of all the checks and balances which give security to religious liberty. It is a genuine representative republicanism; and as such a system, we rejoice in it. At the same time, far be it from us to quarrel with others, because they do not see and appreciate our advantages. As Christians, we acknowledge them to be brethren; we wish to live in good fellowship with them; and if they can go on towards heaven more comfortably in their own way, than with us, GOD SPEED THEM! AND PEACE BE WITH THEM!—It did not seem unnecessary to throw in these remarks after the view which has been given of the objects to which the minister of religion is obliged to extend his attention. But if this seem to others a digression, we will return from it, to observe:—

That the importance of the ministerial office is enhanced, by considering that the religion which we teach connects all the relations and interests of man with eternity. And herein it differs from all other religions. Christianity is a practical vital religion. Its faith is of the operation of God, and leads to God; it purifies the heart, works by love, and overcomes the world. Other systems promise elysium or paradise to the punctual performance of ritual observances, and in general, pass over the great questions of morality, leaving them to the provisions of human prudence, and the enactments of human law. Christianity comes from heaven, and arrayed in celestial glory makes the heart of man its throne. Through that source of all our actions it diffuses the love of God. This principle constitutes the main force of religion. To excite it, the eternal glories of the Creator are unfolded to the understanding of man; not indeed as they shine in their insufferable brightness before the flaming seraphim who surround the throne; but as they radiate from the face of him, who in the greatness of his love and mercy came forth from the glories of the heavens, from the hallelujahs of the blessed; and tabernacled among men, Immanuel, God with us. It is he who with all the power of a conqueror comes and makes the heart his throne, and reigns without a rival. With love of himself he connects every duty, every interest, every enjoyment of life. He must live within us here, if we would live with him hereafter; if we would rejoice in his love forever in the heavens, we must cultivate the spirit of universal love while we dwell

on earth ; if we would partake of the pure and holy inheritance of the saints in light, our hearts must be purified, and we must be holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. Thus does he extend his precepts through all the departments of human life ; and by the powerful motives of his love, and our hopes of happiness in heaven, does he enforce the discharge of every duty. And thus is human life with its concerns, thus are all the objects and duties of the Gospel ministry invested with the glory and grandeur, and majesty of eternity. Thus, I might say, is eternity with all its mighty interests, its untold terrors, its unutterable joys compressed into the narrow circle of one man's ministry, and one man's life. O ! brethren, we utter words of awful import, when we speak as ministers of Jesus. Our message is pregnant with the joys of heaven, or the horrors of the damned. In a word, if time with all that wise men ever regarded in this world ; if eternity with all that the guilty conscience ever feared,—that an outcast spirit ever suffered ; and all that a ransomed soul has enjoyed, or will enjoy of glory, honour, and felicity, through its ceaseless ages be important, then the ministry of the Gospel, which has so close a connexion with these mighty concerns, is surely of unspeakable importance. Who is sufficient for these things? The question would appal the stoutest heart, were we not able to answer, in the language of the apostle, " Our sufficiency is of God." On this we must rely, or there is no hope for us. But this reliance is by no means to be used as a ground of inactivity and security ;—but as a motive and encouragement to the most vigorous exertions. If we fold our arms in indifference, and say—all success must come from God ; the counsel of the Lord will, indeed, stand, and his work will be done by agents of his own raising up—but we may expect the reward of the slothful servant. But if we go forth in the name of the Lord of hosts, with all the fidelity, and zeal, and ardour which become those who labour in a cause so high and holy, and serve a master so good and gracious, we may with confidence say, the work is the Lord's, and it shall prosper.

The view which we have taken of the importance of the gospel ministry, may show the necessity of attending to those admonitions which Paul gives to the evangelists, Timothy and Titus, when employed in settling the churches of Asia Minor, and Crete. We however only glance at this subject. This is not the proper time for a discussion of ministerial qualifications ; because the business of licensure and ordination belongs to the Presbytery. To the Synod appertain other concerns, neither few nor small. And I may be

permitted farther to detain my audience, while I descend from the general views which have occupied our thoughts, to a consideration of some of the duties which should engage our attention, and call forth our best exertions.

In all the plans in which we engage, reference ought to be had to the state of society among us ; to the sentiments and prejudices which prevail ; to the evils which deform the face of the community, and disturb its peace ; and also to the good qualities of the material on which we have to operate. This synod is the Synod of Virginia, and has the general care of all the Presbyterian churches in the State. And at the same time it is bound by the law of love to make every possible provision for the supply of all our fellow-citizens who are destitute of the means of religious instruction. The very title of this ecclesiastical body sounds in the ear with the power of a charm. The name of its location is associated with ideas and feelings of the loftiest kind. Here an asylum was first found, when our forefathers sought a refuge from ecclesiastical tyranny in the old world : here the first permanent settlement was made in forming those colonies which now constitute a great, powerful and happy nation : here have been nourished men who, when the spirit of freedom was banished from every other region, and was about to wing her flight even from this land to more congenial climes, stood forward and maintained her cause in the name and in the strength of the Lord of hosts : here is the seat of hospitality and kindness, of generous feeling and chivalrous ardour : here too were we born and nourished : here were we baptized, and here have we worshipped : here lie the bones of our ancestors, and here the inheritance of our children :—hence, from their humble dwellings have our pious fathers taken their flight to the heavens. Our plains have been consecrated by the blood of patriots ; our houses have been sanctified by the prayers and benedictions of our dying parents ; our temples of worship, few though they be and small, have been recognised as the gate of heaven.—If I forget thee, O Virginia, and remember thee not, my country, may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth ! Yes, because of the house of the Lord which is in thee, I will seek thy good !—It deserves all our wisdom, brethren, to devise, and all our energy to execute measures in our proper sphere, for promoting the present welfare, and the everlasting happiness of our countrymen.

We are to look to the scriptures for maxims to regulate our conduct ; and we are to apply these maxims to the circumstances which occur around us.

In the oracles of truth we read, that for the soul to be without knowledge, it is not good; and hence we infer that it is our duty to be instrumental, as far as possible, in diffusing that sound and wholesome instruction, which, while it prepares men for acting a useful and honourable part as citizens, does not disqualify them for the services of religion, and for the happiness of the blessed. It is for the honour of christianity that wherever her proper effects have been felt, an impulse has been given to the human mind; its best powers have been called into exercise; its highest faculties tasked to their utmost exertions. The truest philosophy is that which has been baptized into Christ; and the sublimest poetry which has ever enraptured our hearts, has been inspired by the muse that holds her seat on the hill of Zion. It becomes the ministers of such a religion as this, while they use all the means in their power to qualify themselves for affording instruction to their people, to be forward and active in promoting every scheme for diffusing useful knowledge among their countrymen. This is a subject which in a peculiar manner ought to interest us, not only because the wise and happy government under which we live, and which as citizens we are bound to support, seems, in the theory of it, to presuppose, and in its whole mechanism to depend on a good degree of knowledge among the people; but because in this young and growing country, the population increases with such rapidity, that every department in life is putting in a demand for greater services than can be rendered without most vigorous exertions for affording a sufficient supply. If every child in the nation, who ought now to be at school, were engaged as he should be, there would not be found teachers sufficient for their instruction, without leaving some other important avocations vacant of incumbents. The history of the church of which we have the honour to be members, will show that I am not going from my legitimate business. It has always, since the day of its formation into a separate body, at the era of the Reformation, to this day, paid great attention to the business of education; and has been forward to propose and support measures for diffusing knowledge. We ask no aids from ignorance to foster the devotion which it is our great business to cultivate; we wish an enlightened people who well understand their duty; who know the constitution of the church; and who are prepared to act with us in promotion of the great cause of righteousness in the world.

This is a subject on which it is unnecessary to dwell.—The members of this Synod will gladly second every attempt to promote useful knowledge among their fellow citizens.

In considering what subjects ought to claim the attention of ministers of the gospel, it has occurred to me that the general doctrines of morality, in the present state of our country, demands most serious regard. In entering on this topic it hardly can be necessary that a caution should be put in to prevent mistakes of the preacher's meaning.—Once for all however I would declare, that the jejune moralizing which has sometimes been palmed on the world for preaching of the Gospel, is an object of my perfect disgust. At the same time I would observe that the practical antinomianism into which the doctrines of grace have been distorted, is an object of horror. Make the Son of God a minister of sin, and turn his grace into licentiousness! The subtilty and malignity of hell neverdevised any thing more monstrously vile—more deserving the deepest, and most blasting curses of eternal justice. In looking round on the condition of our countrymen, it has seemed to me that many very erroneous sentiments respecting moral obligation, and the duties of man prevail among us. Owing to the facility of procuring subsistence, and even accumulating wealth, we find less violence in the clash of interests here, than in old countries. But if there were among the larger part of our population such a constant struggle to procure the common necessaries of life, as multitudes in Europe are doomed to endure, we should, considering the laxness of moral discipline that prevails, in all probability witness a tenfold increase in the commission of crime. And as the population of the country fills up, we may expect less security than we now enjoy, more disturbance than we now apprehend.

Fully to exemplify the general remark under this head might be tedious. Two or three instances then only will be adduced:

1. The moral obligation of men to obey the laws of their country, does not seem to be appreciated. Among us, some laws are habitually set at nought; such as those against usury, against drunkenness, profane swearing, sabbath breaking, fornication, and the like. Some of these violations are committed by professing Christians, and justified on the ground that they do not think these laws to be just or good laws. Others seem to think that if they pay the penalty which the law demands, they have done that which is equivalent to observance of the statute: and others again, that if they can commit their offences so secretly as to escape legal conviction, or if the custom of the place allows the transgression to pass with impunity, no harm is done. It would be easy to show the futility of all these excuses, and the dan-

gerous consequences which may flow from the admission of them. It may be thought more within my province to observe that a right interpretation of scripture would compel us to be subject to all the ordinances of the law for conscience sake, (unless indeed sinful compliances were required,) and then we are bound to "resist unto blood."

Another remark which goes to show the imperfection of moral sentiment among us is this, that many think that they may in right and equity do whatever the law of the land does not specifically forbid. Accordingly all the duties of imperfect obligation, as the old moralists used to express themselves, are set at nought or violated to gratify any whim or caprice of the moment. This error is of great extent, and produces disastrous effects too numerous to be detailed. It may be seen in the eagerness with which men rush to enjoy temporary pleasures, and the backwardness with which they give time or money for the support of plans of real utility; in the hardness with which they drive their bargains; and the confidence with which they claim as their lawful property whatever the ignorance or the necessities of their fellow men may induce them to give. But, what to an enlightened Christian is, perhaps, most painful in this whole affair, there are some called after the name of Christ, who endeavour to make compensation for these moral obliquities, by punctilious regard to external observances, by fervent zeal for a party, and the occasional excitement of strong feelings.

These few remarks must suffice for this part of the subject. They are sufficient to show that as Christian ministers, as acknowledged public instructors, we are called on to make every exertion to promote sound Christian morals among our countrymen. To effect this, it is unspeakably important that due regard should be paid to the moral and religious training of children. This is a theme of deepest import. The welfare of the nation and of the church demands the most serious attention to this much neglected duty. We ought not to disguise from ourselves that here many difficulties impede and embarrass our operations. The ignorance of many parents, the negligence of others, and the open opposition of some, create great embarrassments. That root of bitterness, domestic slavery, renders our way rugged and difficult. But, notwithstanding, it deserves serious consideration whether the wisdom, and the zeal, and the benevolence of the clergy have been brought sufficiently to bear on this subject. It is a mournful sight to contemplate thousands and thousands growing up without moral

and religious discipline, a prey to those strong passions which degrade our nature, and qualify us for the inheritance of unblest spirits in the regions of darkness.

This subject naturally leads to another, of very high importance, that has already occupied, and will for a long time to come demand the best efforts of this ecclesiastical body. I mean the training up of a competent number of religious teachers, to supply vacant churches, to build up waste places, and to carry the glad tidings of salvation to those who sit in darkness and have no light.

The view which has been given, imperfect as it is, of the extent and importance of the functions of a Gospel minister, shows that men destined for this office need much training and discipline to prepare them fully for its duties. And the number, every year increasing, of those who are without religious instruction, demonstrates the necessity of all our zeal, and of every exertion that we can make to supply the spiritual wants of those who are ready to perish. Indifference here is rebellion against the King of Saints; it is treason against the church; it is disloyalty to the best interests of our fellow men.

I shall not undertake to account for the opposition which has been made to measures of this kind. Perhaps the liberal spirit which the Synod has avowed, has not raised the least obstacle with which we have had to contend. There are many who have been in the habit of associating with religious zeal the narrowness of sectarism; and who have in fact identified vital religion and bigotry. All of this class either cannot or will not enter into your feelings.—They will suspect that the true expression of your views and wishes conceals some dark plot, which you are laying in secret; as though you had forgotten all that you owe to your God, had renounced your allegiance to your Saviour; had disregarded the high example of your forefathers, who after vainly stemming the tide of oppression in the old world, sought an asylum here, and were among the foremost to resist unjust claims of arbitrary power; and finally, as though you had hardened your hearts against all the charities of domestic life, and had in the infatuation of wicked purposes, determined to effect an object which would injure your own nearest and dearest connections as well as others! Such are the wild and monstrous suspicions which either wickedness or folly have started, and endeavoured to propagate. This makes it the more necessary, that with prudence and firmness you should pursue your purposes, and be known by your fruits. As far as your principles prevail, security will be given to the order and peace of society, energy to

the laws, permanence to the institutions of the country;—the fear of God and the love of man will prevail. Apart too from these lofty considerations which regard eternity, there are some others, which may well move a native of this State. The immense tract of country in the west is inviting emigrants to its fertile plains. The children of Virginia are going by thousands to form settlements in these new lands; and they will push onward until the western ocean put a stop to their wanderings. A new location of their interests, and a new direction of their business, cuts off intercourse with us. Involved in the difficulties of new settlements, and having a scanty population, they forget religion and its mighty concerns, as much as their descendants forget the place of their fathers. We must keep them in mind, and endeavour to raise missionaries not only to supply the destitute here, but to follow the emigrants to western lands, and bind them, wherever they wander, to their fathers and brethren here, by the law of Christian love. In this way Virginia may put forth a thousand tendrils, which by their gentle, yet powerful grasp, will hold the hearts of her descendants in indissoluble union with her. It is religion, the simple uncontaminated religion of Jesus Christ, which is to form the golden chain to bind together all parts of our republic.

While turning the attention to the south and the west, it is impossible not to contemplate, with powerful interest, both the aborigines of the country, and those descendants of Europeans who live beyond the limits of the United States. Long have the former suffered from the vices and follies of the whites. It is time that some effectual measures were adopted for affording to them the blessings of civilization and christianity. Thanks be to God that the spirit of the Mathers, Elliots, and Brainerds, has begun to revive; and that a society combining the united talents and influence of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, has been formed expressly, though not exclusively, for the christianization of our aboriginal heathen.

That other country, to which allusion has been made, presents a spectacle of most affecting interest. Long have they groaned under the oppressions of a wretched government; and of that court, sacred to the interests of hell, the Inquisition, whose tender mercies are cruel. How often when contemplating their recent struggles, and reading of their miserable disappointments, have I involuntarily conceived the wish, O if they were leavened with the doctrine of Protestanism!—were but the sons of the Puritans among them! This wish proceeds from a deep conviction that the mighty

achievement of emancipating the world is to be accomplished, not by the devices of a misnamed philosophy, nor by the subtilty of politicians, nor by the arms of warriors, but by the still mightier and happier influences of the religion of Christ, freed from foreign admixtures, and unadulterated by the devices of worldly and wicked men. The great principles of ecclesiastical government furnish a happy model for a free constitution. The Bible put freely into the hands of the people, affords an impulse and an excitement to the mind of man, which calls forth its mightiest energies. So that a nation of truly religious people never can be made slaves. Oh, it is Christianity which is to break down the prison walls, and dissolve the chains which bind the oppressed; and set the world at liberty. When her reign shall become universal, tyranny and slavery will become obsolete expressions; or they will be known only in the records of history, as evils with which the happy state of the world is to be contrasted, to enhance the gratitude of mankind. Does this appear to any extravagant? We have no time to enter now into a formal proof, to show that these are the sober deductions of reason. I shall only observe, that if there be any reality in human things, and if our Creator has not deceived us, the Christian religion is true; is the best gift of the most beneficent God. But who can believe that the rights which we enjoy by the constitution of the God of nature are contradicted, abridged, nullified by the religion of God? So far from this, that the coincidence which I perceive between the clearest dictates of natural law, and the arrangements of Scripture, affords evidence to my mind that our religion is from heaven. It is a part of the great argument from analogy, which wise and learned men have urged with so much force. But I have been carried much further from my original purpose than was intended. It was simply to suggest, that if heaven should prosper this body in its designs of establishing a complete theological seminary, the young men who are raised up as missionaries ought, in their course of education, to pursue the study of such modern languages, as will best fit them to execute the functions of missionaries in those countries, which providence seems to have allotted to us in the great plan of evangelizing the world.

It may be thought that it is useless now to mention these schemes, when our institution is yet in its infancy, and holds a precarious existence. To this I would say, that the time is advancing, when the world is to be evangelized. The Gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all nations, the saving health of the Almighty made known to all people.—

The church of Christ is aroused; the heralds of mercy are going forth; the strong angel is flying through the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach. The joyful sound is swelling louder and louder on every breeze:—

"The dwellers on the mountain tops
From distant mountains catch the flying joy."

It is heard on the towers of Moscow and the minarets of Ispahan; in the pagodas of India, and the morais of Otaheite; and it is ours to swell this strain; to make it sound through the plains of Mexico and Peru, and the intervales of the Andes; to plant the rose of Sharon on the western Savannahs, and on the rocky mountains. We are to give ourselves no rest until its fragrance fill these regions, until the river of God water those climes.

Let it sink deep into our hearts, that in this extraordinary time we have a great work to do. The Almighty calls us loudly to it. The fields in which we are to labour are pointed out to us. It becomes us to contemplate the full extent of the demand made upon us; to feel the whole weight of our responsibility; and to be at work like men who expected the coming of their Lord. It is a fearful truth that every individual human being is answerable to God, not only for all the evil which he does, but for all the good which he omits to do. Should we see a man fallen into the fire or the water, and refuse to afford him help, but leave him to perish, we should be scarcely less guilty than the murderer.—In like manner, if we look around us, and see souls perishing in ignorance and sin, and withhold aid for their instruction in righteousness, who will defend us against the charge which the righteous Judge will bring against us in the day of reckoning? When the last account shall be rendered, how much better will be the condition of the slothful servant, than of the avowed rebel? These are questions of deep import. O ye who waste time and treasure in pursuit of temporary gratifications—O ye who are called after the name of Jesus Christ—and especially ye who minister for him in holy things, consider what your Lord requires; look around you and see the work yet to be done; think of perishing souls, of a coming judgment, of heaven and hell; and let every power within you be roused to its utmost exertion.

Our proper object as ministers of the Gospel, although reaching to such an extent, and embracing all the relations of life, is extremely simple. As respects God, it is to promote the honour of his great name; as respects our fellow men, it is to make them wise and good, that they may be happy; wise in the precepts of a sound morality, and a holy religion, in all the duties of all their relations to God and

man; and good citizens, good fathers and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants. We have nothing to do with the trafficking, ambitious, contentious spirit of the world, but by precept and example to reprove it. Truth, and a blameless life, zeal and love are our instruments; the word of God our guide, and salvation our end. The angels, when sympathising with man to all the extent of heavenly benevolence they announced the advent of the long promised Messiah, and proclaimed the intent of his coming in strains of seraphic eloquence, then declared the object of the Gospel ministry as instituted by the Lord Jesus, "Glory to God in the highest; peace on earth; good will to man."—And all that is powerful in the name of country; all that is affecting in the interests of humanity; all that is venerable in the divine Majesty; that is moving in a Saviour's love; that is terrible in the eternal despair of a condemned sinner; that is transporting in the ever-during, ever-growing happiness of ransomed souls, constitutes the motive to unwearied diligence, and unextinguishable zeal, in the discharge of the duties of our station.—God grant us grace to be faithful! AMEN.